



**NYCDOE**

**Quality Review: Final Report**

# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**Booker T Washington School**

**Middle School 54**

**103 West 107 Street  
New York  
NY 10025**

**Principal: Elana Elster**

**Dates of review: December 6 – 7, 2006**

**Reviewer: Derek Lever**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

Booker T Washington School, Middle School 54, is located on Manhattan's Upper West Side. It has 950 students enrolled from grade 6 through grade 8. Its population comprises 37.3% White and 32.6% Hispanic, 25.2% Black and a small proportion of students from other ethnic backgrounds. Approximately 8% of students are newly arrived in the country, principally from the Dominican Republic. At 12%, the proportion of English language learners is about the same as in similar and City schools. There are 10% special education students, a proportion typically found in similar and City schools. The school is not Title 1 eligible.

Attendance rates have improved for each of the last three years and currently stand at 94%, exceeding the City figures but in line with similar schools.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal promotes a strong sense of community wherein all members of the school's diverse population are cared for and valued.
- The principal has a vision and a determination to bring it to reality.
- The school celebrates students' work and achievement by attractive displays throughout a well-maintained building.
- Teachers work hard to support the students in their care.
- Staff are reflective and self-critical about their work.
- There is a thriving parent teacher association and a great deal of support generally for and from parents who are fully involved in the life and work of the school.
- All members of the school community have a commitment to continue to accelerate the improvements already started to be put into effect.

### What the school needs to improve

- Develop a more rigorous, whole-school system for sharing information and school-generated data so all members of staff have a whole-school overview of performance.
- Use the outcomes of data analysis consistently across the school to plan and align work, and set measurable goals based on students' expected progress.
- Develop a more co-ordinated model of professional development that focuses on raising teachers' skills in analyzing and using data to align instruction.
- Produce clear, measurable goals for improvement across all aspects of the school's work and a calendar to show how, when and where resulting actions will be monitored and evaluated.
- Devolve more responsibility for school improvement to senior members of staff.
- Identify more regular opportunities for teachers to plan together.

## Part 3: Main findings

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This is a proficient school.**

The principal has shown effective leadership in the relatively short time she has been in post. She has a clear vision and knows how this will become a reality. Already, there is evidence of improvement in both academic achievement and general school effectiveness. Parents support the school's efforts and, like students, acknowledge the hard work of teachers and staff. Students' work and records of their achievement are displayed to good effect throughout the building, demonstrating just how much all students are valued and respected. Staff think about what they are doing and how changes begun by the principal and her senior leaders are working out. There is still insufficient use of the data that exists in the school. Much of it is analyzed retrospectively rather than used systematically and rigorously to plan and align instruction, and set sharp, measurable goals for improvement. There is almost an impatience for development and although this is a sign of desire for further improvement, there is no timescale that is known and agreed to by all staff. One of the outcomes of this is that the principal is overburdening herself. Knowing that she is the main agent of change, the principal recognizes that a more equitable balance in her time management and devolving some responsibility to other staff are essential. She and the school have the capacity to succeed.

### How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.**

#### **This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school collects a great deal of data. The principal compares her students' performance against the previous year's performance and those of similar schools and this contributes to her view of school effectiveness. There is evidence that she is beginning to use her analysis in school planning and this is appropriate and timely. Teachers produce their own assessments and have an understanding of data from external tests and assessments. They use their data to confirm progress at student, classroom, and grade level. They are able to access information about the school's past performance at various levels, including the results of performance groupings of students, grade levels and academic subject areas. However, there is limited use of this data to check progress from year to year and to identify trends and what teachers need to do individually and collectively to increase the rate of progress of all students. In particular, there is limited in-depth analysis of the performance and progress of some groups of students, including by ethnicity and gender, and to relate this to the school's instructional and curriculum action plans. The principal acknowledges this and is planning to increase professional development opportunities for staff to tackle this weakness. This is timely, especially in view of the recent amalgamation of programs.

There is evidence of qualitative data being gathered and used by staff to act on the views of students. A good example of this is through the recent Real Adolescent Perspectives (RAP) questionnaire of grade 7 students, where students were asked about their feelings

of their school and their part in it. The results were very positive and provide additional insight for staff to explore and develop.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student’s next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student’s learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

There is a new structure for collaborative decision-making and goal-setting. Goals for the school’s long-term success are agreed and action plans formulated. However, as yet goals are not based sufficiently on data analysis. Goals have measures but these are not reviewed against individual or groups of students’ end of year expected performance and do not have timescales by which the planned action is expected to be completed.

The school is not currently adept at using data analysis techniques to obtain a clear overall view of the relative performances of specific groups of students, including by gender, cohort or ethnicity. There is no mechanism for tracking achievement or setting goals for these groups generally or by subject. However, the structure to do this is now in place and staff have the knowledge, skills, access to relevant information, and a growing understanding to sort out the matter, currently undeveloped.

The school shares its high expectations with parents during formal and informal meetings and students during class conferencing sessions. Parents are involved through a variety of means, including meetings and one-on-one conferences. They comment that they are well informed and invited to be major players in decisions that affect their own children. Where students have particular needs, staff are quick to identify the situation and skillful in determining actions to be taken to give appropriate support. Teachers go to tremendous lengths to involve parents. The information they receive is used to set specific goals for those students at risk of under-achieving or drifting.

Overall, all members of the school community are committed to building on this start to make further improvement. One of the key factors is its acceptance that there are undeveloped areas that need addressing.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity and resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.**

**This area of the school’s work is proficient.**

Teachers have sought ways to bridge the mandated curriculum by referring to elements of State assessments, the ‘non-negotiable essentials,’ their own knowledge of the students, and reference to externally provided and school generated data. The result is a closer match between planned teaching and intended learning. The school’s Comprehensive Education Plan identifies this as a priority in light of the decision to amalgamate three of the school’s former discrete programs. There is a wide range of extracurricular activities, and extensive community partnership, including Columbia NYU, School of Visual Arts, and the Beacon Centre that support the school’s curriculum goals.

Teachers are accountable for the quality of their instruction and use different materials, approaches and methods to achieve their aims. They consider what they intend to do and what they have done. However, data is not used to group students or to plan work that is different for the range of performance in each class. In many lessons, students do the same task but with differing amount of support and input. Coaches go into classes to demonstrate how teachers can plan work that is targeted to match each student's level and interest, and to challenge them to reach the next level, but this has not yet achieved consistency across the school.

Budgeting decisions are driven by school priorities which always relate to students. Staffing in the school shows little movement, indicating people's general satisfaction with the life and work of the school. The principal seeks ways to increase opportunities for personal and professional development so that the contribution of all will be enhanced for the benefit of the individual, the school generally and, importantly, the students. Planned programs and learning usually engage students. All staff generally know students' personal and academic needs well. Students feel they can turn to their teachers or guidance counselors should they have issues or concerns of a personal or academic nature.

Attendance has improved for each of the last three years and remains a school priority. There are effective systems in place to monitor absence and these trigger early responses. The change of lunchtime release from school to a no-leave policy has resulted in removing afternoon truancy and in lessons starting on time. The decision was unpopular with many students, parents and staff, but the principal remained resolute and has shown her commitment by doing lunchtime supervisory duties. There has been general acknowledgement that the move has increased student safety.

**Quality Statement 4 - Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The principal, with the support of her staff, has generated improvements across the school during the last year. Expectations for increased student performance and progress are high and these surface when data is analyzed. This has not been an easy journey as many directions have been necessary, particularly but not exclusively in the area of whole-school involvement. Where opportunities for recruitment have occurred, teachers have been selected because of their match to the school's philosophy and what it is endeavoring to do. Compassion, determination and flexibility are some of the required attributes and these are appropriate given the school's currently stage of development.

Most professional development is based on outcomes, often as a result of formal and informal classroom visits, walkthroughs, monitoring by the coaches of students' work or teachers' planning. Teachers are self-critical and open and honest in their evaluations. Good support is given by colleagues but self- and peer-assessments are not consistently aligned with professional development planning. There is no systematic or formalized program to ensure that all teachers, regardless of their status or service, receive professional development outside of that which they are offered post-monitoring or post-scrutiny.

The principal and her senior leaders meet regularly to evaluate overall school effectiveness. The degree to which priorities are being addressed is debated in lively

professional fashion. Everyone's voice is heard and decisions are taken jointly. There are monthly faculty meetings, sessions arranged for administration, coaches, and committees charged with responsibilities for intervention and support. These enable staff to have an up-to-date view of areas for which they have responsibility. What is not so effective is the way the outcomes of these meetings are put together and disseminated to all. Consequently, there is sometimes a lack of understanding of what the total picture is. The school is well aware of this and is beginning to address the matter by seeking a formal way of documenting the decisions taken in the different meetings and communicating it to all members of staff. Teachers do not have enough time to plan together.

The principal frequently observes teaching and has worked out how best to celebrate high quality and indicate where improvement is required. She sees her role as supportive and ensures other colleagues who monitor follow her lead. The aim is improvement. She is well respected by staff, students and parents and works tirelessly to effect further school improvement. She does not delegate enough to other senior staff in order to free time from her teaching and other commitments for her more strategic and managerial role. The school runs smoothly and procedures are clear. Partnerships with outside bodies enhance opportunities for learning and further link the school with its broader community.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerated learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

School plans, drawn together in draft by the principal and her cabinet, contain details of who will be involved in the various stages of compilation. For example, a self-evaluation review document was presented to the school leadership team for comments and amendments. Collaboration is at the heart of the process. Plans that include interventions normally identify when interim assessments will be made and by whom and include measures that give an objective view of whether the plan is being effectively implemented and is on track to reach its stated goals. This is clearly seen, for example, in the Comprehensive Education Plan. It is also present in individual education plans which are comprehensive, user-friendly, and monitored regularly by all who are involved, including, where appropriate, the students themselves. However, monitoring outcomes often stop at "this is what the information is telling us," rather than "what is the information telling us to do next?" This limits opportunities to move forward quickly and establish new plans to accelerate learning.

Comparisons of student progress within classrooms and across grades are made regularly. These feed into evaluations of whether plans and interventions are effective. However, the school measures how much progress students have made rather than measuring whether they are making enough progress towards their goals of expected performance. Decisions as to whether students transfer from the C.O.R.E. program to the Delta program are based on academic performance and belief that these students have the ability to benefit from Delta-style instruction. However, as the school rightly acknowledges, more attention is required to evaluate the overall effects of this new, two-plan system, so that it can show confidently how it helps students to achieve their full potential. The school has the capacity to do this and has already made an effective start.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: Booker T Washington (MS 54)</b>	∅	✓	+
<b>Quality Score</b>		X	

<b>Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor student progress over time.</b>	∅	✓	+
1.1 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>each student, classroom, grade level,</li> </ul>		X	
1.2 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ethnic groups, English language learners, special education students*</li> </ul>	X		
1.3 The school uses available data and generates its own data to provide an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all other categories of interest to the school*</li> </ul>		X	
1.4 Performance and progress are measured based on comparisons with similar schools, with the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grade levels, academic subject areas, ethnic groups, and other groupings of interest within the school.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>		X	

\* These criteria are partially aspirational as of now because schools do not have routine access to all of this data. The NYC DOE plans to provide schools with enhanced access to the necessary data in 2007.

<b>Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use available data to understand each student's next learning step. Through collaborative planning and student and parent engagement, they set high goals for improving teaching practice and accelerating each student's learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
2.1 Using data, school leaders and faculty engage in a collaborative process to set demanding, objectively measurable goals for immediate and long-range improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals.		X	
2.2 Goals and plans focus on the school as a whole and on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject, and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area.	X		
2.3 Particular attention is given to improving the performance and progress of students in greatest need of improvement.		X	
2.4 High expectations are conveyed to students and parents/caregivers. Students and their parents/caregivers are regularly invited to provide information about each student's performance and how to improve. This information is central to setting challenging goals and developing, evaluating, and revising plans.		X	
2.5 Goals and plans for improving student performance and progress drive the activity of all members of the school community: leaders, staff, students, parents, and other partners.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>		X	

<b>Quality Statement 3 – Align Instruction: The school aligns its instructional activity, resources, and student engagement around its focused plans for accelerating learning for each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
3.1 The school selects the curriculum based on how well it aligns with or implements the mandated curriculum and on the curriculum's capacity to generate meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and to support the school's high expectations and improvement plans.		X	
3.2 Teachers are accountable for improving instruction and student outcomes. They plan and differentiate their instruction based on the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.3 Budgeting decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.4 Staffing decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes.		X	
3.5 Scheduling decisions about the use of teacher and student time are guided by the needs that emerge from examining student data and by the focused plan the school develops to improve student outcomes.		X	
3.6 Instructional programs actively engage students.		X	
3.7 Staff know and respect students and respond to their academic needs, as well as their personal needs that affect academic performance. Each student knows and trusts an adult on the staff who is concerned about him or her.			X
3.8 Student attendance and engagement are high priorities. High rates and patterns of absences trigger immediate intervention.			X
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>		X	
<b>Quality Statement 4 – Build and Align Capacity: The development of instructional leadership, staff, and capacity are aligned around the school's collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.</b>	∅	✓	+
4.1 Leaders, faculty, and staff are selected based on their high expectations for student performance and progress and based on their commitment and capacity to use data, compare outcomes within and across classrooms and schools and develop and revise plans and methods to improve performance and progress.		X	
4.2 Professional development decisions are driven by the needs revealed by student data and by the focused plan the school has developed to improve each student's and group of students' outcomes. Professional development is designed to help leaders, faculty, and staff use data, self- and peer-assessments, and collaboration with peers to achieve goals for improved school and student outcomes. Professional development and self- and peer-evaluation are aligned and overlap.	X		
4.3 The principal frequently observes classroom teaching and has a considered strategy for improving the quality of each teacher's instruction. Teachers frequently observe and support each other's classroom instruction with the goal of improving student outcomes.		X	
4.4 Planning, evaluation of results, and revision of plans takes place in teams. Leaders and faculty inform each other of their goals and results, candidly evaluate themselves and each other, and use what is learned to drive improvement.		X	
4.5 The principal is respected and has capacity to effect change.		X	
4.6 The school runs smoothly. Procedures are clear, communicated to all, and are generally followed.		X	
4.7 The school aligns youth development and support services around stated academic goals. Partnerships with outside bodies are routinely used to achieve academic goals.		X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>		X	
<b>Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has built-in structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year, recognizing weaknesses in its improvement plans and teaching practices, and flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.</b>	∅	✓	+
5.1 All school plans and other interventions include frequent interim goals and diagnostic assessments of progress designed to reveal in objectively measurable ways whether the plan is being effectively implemented and reaching stated goals.		X	
5.2 Comparisons of student progress within and across classrooms and schools are used in making interim diagnostic assessments and measuring the progress of plans and interventions.		X	
5.3 Information generated by periodic assessments and diagnostic measures of progress and comparisons is used to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals. Interim and final goals are modified when data objectively demonstrate that revision is required.		X	
5.4 Each plan's interim and final outcomes drive successive phases of goal setting and improvement planning, and each successive phase is characterized by agile and flexible realignment of practices and resources to improve student academic outcomes.	X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>		X	